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The Ku Klux Klan: An Encyclopedia

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The Ku Klux Klan: An Encyclopedia, edited by Michael Newton and Judy Newton. Garland Reference Library of the Social Sciences. New York: Garland Publishing, 1991. xliii, 639 pp. Illustrations, bibliography. \$55.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY WILLIAM D. JENKINS, YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

The continuing presence of the Ku Klux Klan in American life, as indicated by the career of David Duke, has provoked many studies in recent years. The Newtons have added to that literature a reference encyclopedia on the Klan. This book covers the period from the Klan founding after the Civil War through its heyday in the 1920s to the present day. Entries in the encyclopedia include key participants, the terminology of the Klan, related organizations, such as the Order of Pale Faces, and a brief description of activities in each state. Also included are individuals and organizations that opposed the Klan, publications and films related to the Klan, facilities, key events, government agencies, Klan factions, Nazi groups, political parties, and religious groups. A list of entries at the beginning of the book assists the reader in understanding the layout of the references, but unfortunately does not indicate page numbers. A bibliography of works cited concludes the book.

In the preface the authors present an overview of the history of the Ku Klux Klan. While factually accurate, the authors have not taken advantage of the most recent historical scholarship. As a result, they portray the Klan as the "world's oldest, most persistent terrorist organization," a characterization that does not generally apply to the Klan of the 1920s. The problem with this work is indicated by the extent of the bibliography. It includes very few recent, scholarly works on the Klan. The authors have not consulted in depth, nor widely. Nor have they followed the traditional practice of farming out entries to recognized experts.

As a result, the work is unexceptional. Many of the entries are very short, and one wonders if their subjects merited the attention. At times they are also unreliable because of the dependence on secondary sources. For instance, one entry, while misspelling the name of the Grand Dragon of the state of Ohio, Clyde Osborne, incorrectly states that he left that post in 1924. Another entry on Dale Reusch, the Grand Dragon of Ohio in the 1970s and 1980s, does not mention his arrest and conviction in 1985 and subsequent withdrawal from the Klan. It is also mystifying how the entire entry on the Ohio Klan (1920 through 1987) could come from a magazine article published in 1967 or where the material on Tennessee after 1983 came from since the books cited were published earlier.

In short, this encyclopedia lacks quality. It is based on inadequate research from secondary sources and apparently no consultation with recognized experts. It does offer the average reader someplace to go for a reference, but there is little for the serious scholar. Finally, the bibliography does not do justice to the subject. The authors did not select from the best scholarly works available, including those on Martin Luther King by David Lewis and Stephen Oates. Although this book does fill a need, the subject awaits a better successor.

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